

Did Localized Drouth Really Turn Rancher's Brunette Wig Light Grey?

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6-29-67

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MERTZON — Scattered portions of the Shortgrass country are still short on rainfall. Almost every outpost has some ranchland that has yet to celebrate the coming of spring.

Of all the miseries that befall my people, being on the dry side of the fence is by far the champion. Large-scale drouths that would shake the determination of the toughest general in the Israeli army can't match the anguish of feeding one's flocks while the rest of the district blossoms into abundant greenery.

All of these localized dry spells follow the same pattern. Clouds will start skipping one particular section. If any moisture falls, it isn't enough to float the bugs to the bottom of the rain gauges. As the dreary condition progresses, the affected ranchers undergo marketed changes. Multiple double-stage eye tics become commonplace. Stooped backs and acute cases of the dry knee wobble are much in evidence. Citizens are frequently observed staring far off into space.

A number of other phenomena accompany these scourges. Dogs howl mournfully, long into the parched nights. Alley cats may completely skip their breeding cycles. Milk cows become restless, rarely spending one peaceful moment shaded up under a tree.

These weather blights also spawn wild ideas among the people. Rumors and gossip thrive as the gloom darkens.

For example, at the height of the drouth in the 50s, one rancher supposedly became so distraught from worry that his 1956 model black toupee turned as grey as the underside of a Canadian goose. Before he or his family realized what was happening, his artificial hair piece was frosty, from the cowlick to the thread in the inner lining.

Now mind you, this has been 10 years ago, and there's still doubt in some people's mind as to whether the story is fact or fiction. Some say the report was nothing more than another of a series of old ranchers' tales. Others claim the whole deal was a hoax, saying that anyone with the price of a packet of dye could color his wig any shade from sundown dust to rainbow resin. These skeptics maintain that the hombre dyed his hair to gain sympathy from the banks and loan companies.

On the other side, defenders of the report contend that if dry weather used to discolor scalps in the time of the Indians, it could very well do the same thing to a manufactured wig. These old hardheads base their argument on the stories of how the redmen always felt lucky if a pole full of pelts graded No. 2 or commercial in dry years. Prime and choice scalps were unknown among tribes of the Shortgrass Country; they had only No. 1 or 2 commercial grade.

At this writing, the debate continues, the only way the matter will ever be settled is to wait and see if it happens again. If the weather across the Shortgrass county continues to be the same as it has been so far, we'll probably have a similar case pop up somewhere this summer. And from the way the skies look this morning, that day may be a lot closer than we think.